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Plans to Strengthen
Appropriations Unit

By BRUCE B. VAN DUSEN

Journal-Bulletin Washington Bureau

Washington — Tuesday's election has made possible a major shakeup and strengthening of the powerful House appropriations committee, and Rep. George H. Mahon, D-Tex., the chairman, intends to do just that.

Because of deaths, resignations and election defeats, the 53-member committee has been reduced to 35. Nine of the losses came from among the 20 Republican members, and six were from the Democratic majority of 30.

Reached yesterday at his apartment in Lubbock, Tex., where he was resting after his election campaign, Mr. Mahon said he was unwilling to talk much about his plans to beef up the committee. But he said he and the senior Republican on the committee, Rep. Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, agree that "we want a strong committee that will have a really forceful role in the Congress."

The first problem facing Mr. Mahon is how large a committee he wants.

Since 1952, the committee has been set by House rule at 50 members, with a 3-2 ratio of Democrats to Republicans set by custom only. Over the previous 30 years the committee grew from 35 members, and the ratio varied from better than 2 to 1 to about 5 to 3 for the majority party.

Although Mr. Mahon has not given any indication that he wants a change from the custom of recent years, he would not commit himself to retaining either the size or the present party ratio yesterday.

"There may be a policy decision by the leadership to change it somehow," he said, adding, "You know we have a lot of Democrats to put on committees now."

The election is bringing 37 more Democrats to the House.

Mr. Ford said yesterday that he favors no changes in the committee size or ratio but said the increased Democratic majority might require a shift in the ratio to 32 Democrats and 13 Republicans.

A second problem facing Mr. Mahon will be what subcommittees to establish and who to name as their chairmen. Most observers here will be watching to see if he exercises the same power and independence of his predecessor, the late Rep. Clarence Cannon of Missouri, who shifted subcommittees and members about at a whim to keep the committee operating in his own conservative image.

Mr. Mahon said he already has decided to continue the custom of permitting a man to head only one subcommittee.

Thus he can, if he wants, remove Rep. Otto Passman, D-La., from his chairmanship of the foreign operations subcommittee which oversees foreign aid spending. This is because Mr. Passman normally would become chairman of a second subcommittee dealing with the Treasury and Post Office Departments because the present chairman, Rep. J. Vaughan Gary, D-Va., is retiring.

Also because of this decision, Rep. Michael J. Kirwan, D-Ohio, will have to give up either his chairmanship of the subcommittee on public works or the subcommittee on the Department of Interior.

But Mr. Mahon apparently does not intend to apply this rule to himself. He said he will continue to be the active chairman of the subcommittee on defense appropriations. He would not say anything about giving up his chairmanship of the secret subcommittee which

reviews appropriations for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Another problem is whether to reestablish a "deficiencies" subcommittee which handled requests from various agencies which had overspent their budgets. Mr. Cannon summarily eliminated the subcommittee recently when he decided that its chairman, Rep. Albert Thomas, D-Tex., was too liberal.

Already the maneuvering for the coveted seats on the appropriations committee has begun, and these efforts—which involve getting the backing of one's state delegation as well as the ranking members of the committee—will increase in intensity as the weeks pass.

Mr. Ford said yesterday that he will not hesitate to have one of the freshman Republican members from the Deep South named to the committee despite a strong tradition against naming newcomers to the prestigious appropriations, rules or ways and means committees.

He said he does not intend to give any preference to these new Southerners, but added that giving them positions of real responsibility is "the only way to convince the voters down there that we recognize them as Republicans."

The 63-year-old Mr. Mahon and the 51-year-old Mr. Ford are close friends who have much the same moderately conservative attitude toward federal spending. Neither gave any indication yesterday that any radically new changes are in the wind for the committee, but both agreed that what is most needed is a number of dedicated, hardworking and responsible members to fill the many committee vacancies.

Mr. Mahon emphasized that Congress has the important role of approving presidential proposals and "must stand on its own two feet" as it acts to approve or disapprove legislation.

There was no indication that any of these potential changes would affect the role of Rep. John E. Fogarty. The Rhode Island Democrat will remain as chairman of the subcommittee on the Departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare. Changes in the committee rankings on the seniority ladder, to seventh ranking position.